

## Research Article

# Appraisal of the Nigerian Reform Agenda on Bureaucracy-Challenges and Obligations

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## A B S T R A C T

Since the attainment of independence, different Nigerian Administrators or Governments have pursued one type of reform or another, especially in the Federal civil service. Yet it could be said today that the federal civil service is sick and needs more reforms because all other reforms are not either put in place or partially put in place and deliberately frustrated by the actors who are eager to stop at nothing to ensure that the government is brought under their knees. According to Magbadelo, J.A (2016), the problems that instigated the introduction of a series of reforms in the Federal Civil Service in 1999 consequent upon the inauguration of the democratic government included the erosion of the public service ethics, ageing workforce, poor succession planning, inappropriate organisational structures, unproductive work operations, lack of competent leadership, nepotism, tribalism etc. However, these problems are still prevalent today and even in a more dangerous dimension. The responsibility lies with the people today to either make the government improve on the civil or let the civil service stop to exist. Bureaucrats should be appointed into key positions of the civil service and not politicians who are there to create the “conduit pipes” because of greed, and all other negative vices. The time is now if we actually want the civil service to survive like other developed nations of the world.

**Keywords:** Appraisal, Nigerian Reform Agenda, Bureaucracy, Obligations, Nigerianization Commissions

## Introduction

Reform is seen by Pollitt & Boukaert in their comparative analysis of public sector reform as “intentional modifications which is aimed at achieving a functional and smooth running of the public sector” (Pollitt & Boukaert 2011).

Innovations, Reforms, Modernization and changes are management concepts which are used variously to ascribe to total quality management process, which are aimed at improving methods for achieving effective, efficient and increased output efficiency and overall service/product

delivery. In Human Resource Management, its’ cardinal objectives are premised on how best to achieve the deployment of human capital, with the goal to obtaining the greatest task accomplishment at least comparative cost. In production management, it targets the best way to combine in the management process money, men and materials in order to achieve optimum organisational objectives.

The civil service reform agenda which took some years back, is a combination of all of the above management processes and principles aimed at the rightsizing, re-skilling, re-tolling, reduction of waste and corruption,

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entrenching a transparent public sector procurement system and enhancing coordination within the system for prompt, efficient and effective delivery of goods and services, which are in tandem with the aspirations and dynamics of the society.

The federal civil service commission is a constitutional body established by the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria with spelt out mandate in paragraph (ii) of the third schedule, section 153(1) d. the civil service commission was consciously set up and predates independence before it was enshrined in the constitution.

No doubt therefore, that the reasons for its existence were self evident in a multi-ethnic and developing society like ours. The commission according to Pollitt & Boukaert, was not treated fairly as done in the 1988 Decree except due recourse was to have taken on the relevant constitutional amendment. The Agada's report of 1999-however, fully restored its powers. Any changes to this effect should however, bear in mind the *raison detre* of the commission and it is advised that due process be followed in the constitutional amendment, Adi, Osborne Jr. (1999).

### The Nigerian Civil Service

According to Olawale S. (2018) the Nigerian civil service is very inefficient and as a result, it has undergone a lot of reforms as will be discussed here. The Nigerian experience and drive to take its civil service to its desired destination, in the last sixty years had resulted in over twelve reforms, some of which according to the researcher are: the Nigerianization commissions report of 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1949 which transformed the employment, promotion and disciplinary powers of the Lieutenant Governors of Lagos, South and Northern Nigeria to that of a central public service Board, the Nigerian order in council of 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1952 which transformed the board into a central public service commission with wider powers to deal with management of a Federal Public Service, the Macpherson constitution of 1953/54 which created Regional Civil Service under the slogan "Unity in Diversity", the Morgan Salaries and Wages Commission of 1963, Wey Panel on public service management and salary administration 1968, Elwood Grading Team of 1969, Adebayo Commission of 1970, the Public Service Review Commission (Udoji Report) 1974, Study Team on the Structure, Staffing and Operations of the Nigerian Civil Service (Philips Report) 1985, presidential Task-force on the implementation of the Civil Service Reforms (Koshoni Report) 1988, which resulted in Decree 43 of 1988, the Ayadi Review panel of 1995 and the last current public service reform premised on the NNEDS document, Adi, (1999).

The Udoji Reform of 1974 and the Koshoni Reform of 1988 (Decree 43 of 1988) perhaps had more far reaching consequences on the service. The Udoji reform introduced

a number of key changes in the civil service, Naijaquest.com (2018).

These changes include:

- The opening up of the post of chief executives of ministries (Permanent Secretaries) to both administrative and professional/ specialist staff;
- The harmonization and unification of Job gradings and salary systems throughout the service;
- The increase in public sector wage remuneration;
- The introduction of a merit system as a basis for review and upward mobility in the service;
- The introduction of an open reporting system;
- The introduction of a new code of conduct for all public officers;
- The introduction of modern management style, techniques and culture.

Unfortunately as the researcher noted and is widely agreed, only the increase in public sector remuneration was readily implemented. All other policies advocated by that commission were not sufficiently addressed until the period they were brought back in a distorted form in Decree 43 of 1988.

The 1988 civil service reform had some dominant features that included

- The politicization of the civil service by removing the accounting powers of permanent secretaries and bestowing them on the ministries who were political appointees and in most cases were not professional civil servants. The minister automatically became the chief Executive and Accounting officer of the ministry. This trickled down to the states where the permanent secretary's powers went to the commissions who also were political appointees and non career civil servants.
- It abolished the position of permanent secretaries and replaced it with that of the Director-General;
- The position of the Director-General was made a political appointment, thus eroding the concept of permanent and security of tenure;
- The pooling system was abolished and civil servants were expected to remain in the ministries where they were caught up by the reform.

It sustained and reinforced the powers of Personnel Management Board of the ministries with ministers and Directors-General exercising very wide powers on appointment, promotion and discipline in the civil service to the disadvantage of the civil service commission to whom these powers are vested constitutionally. Ironically, the reform also proceeded to subsume the functions of the commission under the office of the Head of Service of the federation and Head of Service of the states.

However, ten years later, precisely by 2008, the under listed

damages to the Nigerian civil service stated manifesting. Damages Done to the Nigerian Civil Service (Challenges)

#### **Appointment Promotion & Disciplinary Matters:**

The overloading of the junior staff cadre on GL.01/GL.06 this cadre which is comparatively less productive at this point in time constituted about 70% of the total staff strength of the Federal Civil Service.

#### **Irregular appointments, promotions and staff discipline:**

With the appointment of politicians to head the core civil service positions, the chief executives and accounting officers of the ministries, the Extra-Ministerial Departments on whom Decree 43 conferred so much powers, abused appointments, promotions of staff and discipline.

#### **Lack of Uniformity in the standards:**

There was no uniformity in the standard of recruitment, promotion and discipline across the entire civil service and the issue of the so called federal character was completely abandoned.

#### **Abuse of powers:**

There were arbitrary suspension of officers beyond stipulated periods and inappropriate disciplinary procedures, indeed many officers were suspended at the whims and caprices of both political and administrative heads,

#### **Constant Complains:**

Excessive complaints by serving officers against stagnation without justifiable reasons, hence, lowering of the morale of staff.

#### **Round pegs in Squared holes:**

Many political heads did not recruit the right mix of required staff due to corruption, nepotism and tribalism, despite the guideline provided by the Federal Civil Service Commission, Hence, professionalism, based on core competence which ought to be the hallmark of reform could not be attained, there was therefore, general loss of direction in the system.

#### **Corruption:**

There was great prevalence and virtual institutionalization of corruption at all levels of the civil service and complete disregard for financial accountability and probity.

#### **Decline in Productivity:**

There was a decline in the levels of efficiency and effectiveness, morals were low and the entire system was that of frustration among the civil servants especially, because of low level of remuneration, job insecurity and absence of basic working materials.

#### **Politicization of the service:**

Politicization of the civil service especially at the top echelon

with results that excessive cultural, pluralistic and social cleavages derived from ethnic and religious influences were brought to bear on the Human Resources Management of the civil service.

#### **Collapse of systems and structures:**

The uniform system of organisation and methods management adopted by the pooling system used in servicing the human resource needs of the service could not deliver required productivity, efficiency and targets due to its faulty approach and application.

The immediate statistical consequence of the 1974 and 1988 Reform was that by 1998 when the federal Government took stock of its workforce, it had tripled, to 273,392 civil servants. A peep into history shows that the strength of the Federal Civil Service grew from less than 30,000 in 1960 to 45,154 in 1970, to 98,877 in 1974, to 213,802 in 1998 and reaching its peak at 273,392 by the time Ayida Committee was submitting its report in 1995.

This expansion in the strength and scope of the federal civil service could largely be ascribed to the need to pursue aggressive Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation at the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, as well as, the oil boom of 1970s which generated rapid economic activities, that were managed largely by public servants. However, the strength of the service peaked in the early 1990s not solely because of increased Governmental activities but could partly be explained that it was largely due to abuse of the Human Resource Management process in the service, as a results of its politicization and the concentration of both executive and Accounting powers on the political Heads of the Ministries/Extra-Ministerial Establishments, rather than the bureaucrats. This however, resulted in the series of decay and misdirection that the public service reform is still grappling with today as noted by the researcher.

#### **Objectives of the Civil Service Reforms**

The objectives of the last civil service reforms of 1995 were anchored on the following

- Restoring the professionalism of the civil service;
- Tackling corruption and improving transparency in Government accounts and that of joint venture oil companies;
- Reducing waste and improving efficiency of Government expenditures;
- Enhancing economic coordination;
- Rationalizing the sector and eliminating ghost workers.

In order to achieve the above objectives, it is understood that public officers including senior government officials with leadership roles in the reform process must ensure that the mistakes of the past were not allowed to repeat. This was because casualties in the civil service being

jaundiced, over bloated, distorted, structure, capacity deficiency, underutilization, irregular and untimely services, primordial and pluralistic tendencies being encouraged, as well as corruption which was enthroned due to greed and insecurity of tenure. The researcher however observed that looking back to history, for example, the Nigerian Regime during the 1975/1976 purge, during which very senior and experienced bureaucrats were retrenched and many were suddenly homeless with a motion set in place for under parasternal growth and some much proliferation.

### **(Obligation)**

#### **Repairing the Already Disjointed Civil Service**

In the process of repairing the already disjointed civil in Nigeria, the researcher notes that the following be put into consideration;

#### **Appointments, Promotion and Discipline:**

The over bloating of the service, irregular appointments which characterized the ills of the system in the past should be discouraged and not allowed to occur again after the reforms have been put in place.

There are still elements of arbitrary use of powers on some ministries and states that have not taken time to carryout promotions of staff in the last 4 years even though they are expected to be undertaken yearly;

#### **Full Implementation of the Policy on Monetisation in Order to Reduce Waste & Improve Workers Benefit**

It is interesting to note that the monetization process has been in process but yet to be fully implemented in some quarters. However, in some quarters the disengagement of all domestic servants employed by Government, whose positions are monitored or out-sourced has been gradually implemented but the severance documentation from service officers on GL07 and above by the issuance of letters of disengagement is taking time to be effected. For civil servants to give their best they should be paid well and all their necessary benefits paid in time to enable them continue with their lives elsewhere after retirement. Most State Governments are guilty of this and have a backlog of retirement benefits and others to defray (Nnebi 2006).

#### **Computerization:**

In order to improve the quality of work, enhance efficiency in the management of information system and productivity, government embarked on the disengagement of some staff, typists and most secretaries from the service. However, was a fall out of the computerization of all Government staff and operations? Some states had progressively eliminated this group of workers and some are yet to outstanding after many years.

The computerization exercise is ongoing and no doubt has

yielded some positive results, yet in some quarters they still find the loopholes to carry out these fraudulent activities as noted by the researcher.

- Tackling the Human Resource Issues of Appraisal for effective promotion and upward mobility in the service.
- Entrenchment of Labour Laws and Financial Rules Reform in order to bring about modern industrial relations management practices to improve the system.

### **Conclusion**

Currently, civil servants are appointed with spelt out conditions of service, some of which are now being reformed through the policy on monetization. These includes the new policy on Transportation Allowance, Medical Health Insurance Scheme, the new pensions scheme and the sale of Government Houses occupied by the civil servants, according to Salami, A & Odeyemi (2012), who posits that Government must tread cautiously in the areas of sales of Government Houses occupied by pensionable civil servants because civil servants are required to pay an initial deposit of 10% of value running into millions of Naira. The payment model should be re-examined to enable these civil servants pay by terminal benefits while not impoverishing them. The process should also take into consideration what these civil servants that occupy such buildings had paid over the years, through the cost of what may have accrued to them as their housing allowance entitlements. It is only by doing that this reform on the monetization policy on sales of Government Quarters could be said to be in tandem with practices in civilized democracies, Ajayi, G.O. (2006).

### **Recommendations**

- The reintroduction of permanent secretaries is welcome, however, it is recommended that managers of the system should pursue vigorously, policies that do not politicize the service, which in the past eroded the permanence/ security of tenure and created uncertainty in the mind frame of employees/ managers of the civil service. It is still observe that in some states of the federation, the Governor could easily call-up retired civil servants who should be resting and giving space for upcoming civil servants to get back to work irrespective of the fact whether they had completed their second tenure of 4years respectively. They do this with bias and this does not go well in the system.
- The adaptation of the fine aspect of other systems rather than adoption, when desirable should be pursued, based for instance on the experience of the British Merit system of public service, the American "spoils" system, the Japanese Management by objective system and the Malaysian Home-grown system, in our effort to complement reforms that will respond to our social divergent needs, within the level of our economic

development, standard of living, cost of living, deficit in social amenities and the high level of unemployment worsened by an alarming rate of under development in our society.

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